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# It's no holds barred in the world of spies

*Diplomatic etiquette stops at the doors of both embassies*

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Collecting intelligence about foreign countries is often a no-holds-barred enterprise — particularly with regard to potential enemies. Diplomatic protocol may stipulate that diplomatic communications be confidential, that diplomatic pouches be inviolate and that an embassy be a refuge for a nation's diplomats. Intelligence agencies, however, do not adhere to diplomatic protocol.

The basic truth is that both superpowers exploit their embassies for intelligence collection and try to penetrate each other's embassies.

Take the Soviet embassy in Washington, which serves as the headquarters for the chiefs of the KGB and GRU networks in the United States — and for their agents, who account for more than one-third of all the Soviet personnel there. The embassy is also used to conduct a large-scale communications interception operation, with a high-frequency rooftop antenna pointed toward the Pentagon and State Department. Another antenna is focused on a CIA communications facility in Virginia, while other antennae are capable of monitoring telephone conversations, police and FBI communications and government car phones.

Interception activity from the embassy is not directed exclusively at military, law-enforcement and foreign-policy institutions. Intercepts of Department of Commerce, Agriculture and Treasury conversations can also be of great value. In the early 1970s, the Soviets monitored all telephone calls to the Department of Agriculture so as to be well-informed about the state of the US grain market. They used this information to negotiate a 1974 grain deal that is referred to by American farmers as the "great grain robbery."

## New Soviet embassy in Washington

Soviet embassy interception capabilities will improve when they occupy their new embassy — an event that may be delayed, given President Reagan's declaration that the Soviets would not be allowed to move in until the United States was able to move in to a new and bug-free embassy in Moscow. The new Soviet facility is located on Mount Alto, at an elevation of 300 feet. At that height, Soviet interception antennae will have a virtually unimpeded "electronic view" of the nation's capital.

Similarly, the US embassy in Moscow serves as the center for US espionage operations in the Soviet Union. The CIA chief of station and his intelligence officers operate under the cover of the Foreign Service. It is these individuals who have handled the important sources recruited by the

CIA within the Soviet government. Among those sources were GRU Col. Oleg Penkovsky — who passed on thousands of pages of documents detailing Soviet military and economic capabilities — and Adolf G. Tolkachev, an electronics specialist at a military-aviation institute in Moscow, who saved the United States billions of dollars in development costs by informing the US government about the nature of Soviet military aviation efforts.

The United States also uses its Moscow embassy for communications interception purposes. Targets of the operation include Soviet government communications, including those of the military and KGB. It is known that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, an embassy antenna was employed to intercept the car radio-telephone conversations of Soviet Politburo members — including General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, President Nikolai Podgorny and Premier Alexei Kosygin — as they drove around Moscow. The "take" from the operation did not include information of the invasion of Czechoslovakia or other military and political secrets. According to a CIA official involved in the operation, known as GAMMA GUPPY, the data were "very gossipy — Brezhnev's health and maybe Podgorny's sex life."

The US and Soviet use of their embassies for intelligence purposes is one factor in making them intelligence targets. One purpose of suborning the Marine guards at the US embassy in Moscow was to gain access to areas that might yield information on the identities of CIA officers undercover, their Soviet contacts, US knowledge of Soviet intelligence and security capabilities and the target of both human and electronic intelligence operations. Additionally, the penetration of the embassy can yield diplomatic secrets on negotiating positions for arms-control talks, the interpretation placed on Soviet actions by US officials in Washington and Moscow and presidential instructions on how to deal with the Soviets on a variety of important issues.

It should not be surprising, then, that the KGB would go to great lengths to gain access to the embassy — by suborning Marine guards, bugging rooms, taping phone lines, inserting KGB agents among the Soviet employees there and bugging the portions of the new US embassy that the Soviets were permitted to build them-

selves. Such activities were first noticed in 1952, when an eavesdropping device was discovered inside a US seal on the wall of the ambassador's office. Between that time and 1960, the United States found over 40 such devices in the embassy. In 1978, bugs were found in an embassy chimney as well as embassy typewriters.

Nor should it be surprising that the United States also conducts such operations. The same type of intelligence that leads the Soviets to seek to penetrate the US embassy in Moscow is available to the United States if it wishes to penetrate the Soviet embassy in Washington. In 1979, the United States tried to implant eavesdropping devices in apartment buildings at the new Soviet complex under construction in Washington. The FBI monitors people coming and going from the Soviet embassy and routinely taps its phone lines. A conversation recorded several years prior to his trial was employed by the prosecution in their case against former National Security Agency employee Ronald Pelton, who was eventually convicted of selling sensitive information on US communications intelligence activities to the Soviets.

#### **Spying a worldwide practice**

Attempts to penetrate each other's embassies are not restricted to Washington and Moscow, but a worldwide practice. Harry Rositzke, a former CIA operative, has noted that "a one- or two-year penetration of a Soviet embassy can provide classified information going far beyond the parochial concerns of the embassy itself; broad policy reports from the Soviet foreign office; party correspondence from the Central Committee; new directives from KGB or GRU headquarters."

Another former CIA officer, David Phillips, defined what would constitute complete penetration of a Soviet embassy: "at least one spy within...; the ability to read the mail to and from the embassy; being able to listen to telephone calls; at least one microphone broadcasting secrets from within; the capability of obtaining photographs of everyone working in the embassy and nearly everyone who visited; and access to its trash."

The Soviet embassy in Mexico City is a particularly high-priority target. In the 1960s, the CIA established two observation posts in front of the embassy to cover the entrances, while a third post was placed opposite the back of the embassy to provide coverage of its gardens. All the observation posts were used for taking photos of personnel and visitors as well as the license plates of visiting cars. At one point, films were made of Soviet officials talking in the garden area, but lip-readers were unable to decipher the conversations.

Other operations involved the moni-

toring of Soviet telephones and the running of agents against Soviet personnel. The targeted personnel included the Soviet press attache, a TASS correspondent and the embassy's administrative officer. During a visit to a nearby grocery store (whose owner was on the CIA payroll), the administrative officer was introduced to a Mexican girl recruited by the CIA. An affair followed, as planned, with the CIA recording and photographing the events.

It is important to keep the events in Moscow in perspective. The Soviet actions should not be taken as some especially hostile act perpetrated against innocents. Those actions are part of the espionage game played by both sides. Hence, the president was quite correct in not letting those actions interfere with arms-control negotiations.

It is also important not to exaggerate the degree of damage. The functioning of the embassy will certainly be disrupted, as will US intelligence operations in Moscow. But whatever diplomatic secrets the Kremlin may have gained are unlikely to be exploitable in such a way as to seriously damage the United States - simply because the course of US-Soviet relations is essentially determined by each nation's leaders' perceptions of their national interest and the existence of strategic parity, rather than by gleaning inside information.

And while the Moscow-based intelligence operation may suffer, that is only one means of gathering intelligence about the Soviet Union. Of greater importance are the satellites, aircraft, listening posts and other technical means of intelligence collection that operate outside Soviet territory.

Thus, the events of the last several weeks are likely to be more important as the catalyst for a much-needed improvement in security procedures rather than as events that significantly alter history to the detriment of the United States.

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